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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRESIDENT GUL URGES PAKISTAN OPPOSITION TO JOIN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 b, d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Turkish President Gul, during a December 2-3 visit to Islamabad, urged Pakistan's opposition leaders to put President Musharraf above the political fray and compete amongst themselves in the upcoming, January 6 elections. Pointing to the long and bumpy road Turkish politicians have followed, democracy, Gul told them, does not come overnight; stability must come first. The Turks are hopeful that Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) will participate in the election, but reported no progress convincing Imran Khan or the Jamaat-e-Islami to do so. This was the first time any Turkish leader has waded more than an inch deep into Pakistani politics and openly urged another country to benefit from Turkey's own hard-won experience. The GOT breathed more easily when the political class in "brotherly" Pakistan did not view Gul's message as an affront. A successful Pakistani election will allow Turkey to resume efforts to deepen the level of cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, by bringing the leaders to Turkey for another summit and reinvigorate the Joint Working Group that monitors implementation of their Ankara Declaration commitments.

¶2. (C) Former NATO Afghanistan senior civilian representative Hikmet Cetin remains the Turkish choice for the Afghanistan "super envoy" coordinator position, but if the U.S. is serious about Paddy Ashdown, and convinces Karzai, Turkey will pull back Cetin's candidacy. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

NOT THE USUAL VISIT: GUL URGES OPPOSITION LEADERS TO JOIN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

¶3. (C) MFA Deputy Director General for South Asia Babur Hizlan told us December 7 that President Gul's December 2-3 trip to Pakistan was highly unusual, both in preparation and execution. Turkey's close relations with Pakistan allowed for it; Pakistan would not have accepted it from another country, nor would Turkey have sought it elsewhere. With Pakistani stability key to regional stability, President Gul hoped to play a constructive role, helping to normalize the political situation there. Gul successfully reached out to all opposition leaders, telling them democratization is good and necessary, but it does not arrive overnight. Stability should be the priority. Political parties should put

Musharraf above the political fray and compete against each other.

¶4. (C) In addition to meeting with caretaker PM Soomro, Gul met separately with Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, Imran Khan, and other political leaders, including from the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam), and other, smaller ethno-religious parties. Gul's main message to Pakistan's opposition leaders was clear: get on board with elections, even if conditions seem less than ideal. He did not focus on questions concerning the judiciary or when the emergency would be rescinded. Bhutto told Gul she wants to participate in the election and asked for his help convincing Sharif to do the same. Sharif remained circumspect. Imran Khan couldn't be convinced. The JI will not participate either. In his opposition meetings, Gul recounted the difficult path Turkish politicians have faced over the decades consolidating democracy in Turkey. Pakistan's opposition leaders needed to use the opportunities presented to them. He cited PM Erdogan and former Turkish President Demirel as politicians who, despite repeated attempts to exclude them from government, always chose to return to power through the electoral process. Demirel, for example, despite being jailed during the 1980 military coup here, returned to the political arena as soon as possible and later became Turkey's president. Gul also cited the Iraqi experience, highlighting the political isolation from which Iraqi Sunnis have been trying to extricate themselves since boycotting politics in Baghdad.

¶5. (C) Hizlan sounded relieved Pakistan's political leaders did not accuse Gul of meddling. At the joint press conference following his meeting with Musharraf, Gul emphasized he did not wish to interfere in Pakistan's domestic affairs. Musharraf, who welcomed Gul at the press conference in Turkish, said he thought the opposition

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meetings would be positive and in his country's interest. He said, "My brother Gul is going to speak for Pakistan because his interest is in Pakistan, and not in any individual or political party." Gul emphasized Turkey's solidarity with Pakistan in its struggle against terrorism, stating, "functioning democratic institutions will strengthen Pakistan's hand in its fight against terrorism." Calling for unity in Pakistan, he said, "governments and their people should struggle on one front in order to eliminate this curse."

GUL ADVISES MUSHARRAF TO BE PRESIDENTIAL

¶6. (C) Presidential and PM Foreign Policy Advisor Ahmet Davutoglu told Ambassador December 7 that President Gul's visit had been decided upon shortly after his election as president in August. An early visit to Pakistan has been a standard for Turkish leaders, along with Northern Cyprus and Azerbaijan. President Musharraf's declaration of an emergency, however, complicated the visit's timing. Ankara waited for at least a symbolic softening of the emergency's hardest edges, but wanted to go forward while Turkey could still make an impact on normalizing Pakistani politics. According to Davutoglu, Gul's message to Musharraf was to be presidential, avoid taking sides among political parties and forces, and separate himself from the day-to-day operations of government. This should fall to a new prime minister elected by the parties in parliament. Gul was up front about his wish to meet with opposition figures, and Musharraf posed no objections. Davutoglu noted the meeting with Gul was the vehicle for Sharif's first visit to Islamabad since returning from exile. What could have been a protest trip, he said, went off smoothly, and even provided cover for contacts with the government. Davutoglu indicated that Sharif and Bhutto took Gul's message well. He believed that both would avoid a boycott of the elections, even as matters remain tense and difficult for them.

JUMP-STARTING PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN COOPERATION

¶7. (C) Subsequent to Pakistan's elections and formation of a new government, the GOT plans to invite the leaders of Pakistan and Afghanistan to Istanbul. The leaders last met in Ankara in April 2007, where they adopted the Ankara Declaration committing the two sides to a series of confidence-building and cooperation measures, with Turkish support. The summit should be immediately preceded by a meeting of the Deputy FM-level Joint Working Group (JWG), tasked to monitor implementation of the Ankara Declaration commitments. The JWG last met in Ankara in July 2007. Hizlan encouraged us to provide suggestions on how the GOT can help further cooperation and dialogue between the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan. He noted that Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) President Hisarciklioglu accompanied President Gul and is eager to work with the U.S. on projects to spur economic development in the region, especially along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Hizlan added that TOBB Economics and Technology University is considering establishing a university in Pakistan, perhaps in partnership with Turkey's Middle East Technical University (METU).

GOT WILL HOLD BACK ON HIKMET CETIN FOR AFGHANISTAN COORDINATOR IF U.S. DETERMINED ON ASHDOWN

¶8. (C) Hizlan told us the GOT supports former NATO Afghanistan senior civilian representative Hikmet Cetin for the Afghanistan "super envoy" coordinator position. Turkey's UN Ambassador Baki Ilken recently met with Ambassador Khalilzad and told him that if the U.S. is determined to have Paddy Ashdown assume the position, and Karzai is convinced, then Turkey will hold Cetin back. Otherwise, the GOT will put him forward as a candidate.

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